

Coping with Academic Work and Nursing Motherhood: The Case of Akenten Appiah Minkah University of Skills, Training and Entrepreneurial Development (Aamusted), Kumasi

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Abstract: *The study explored how student nursing mothers cope with academic work at AAMUSTED. An interpretive philosophical paradigm, qualitative research approach and exploratory case study design were used to guide the study. The study was grounded in Role Conflict and self-determination theories. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques was used to select 15 nursing mothers for the study. The data were gathered through interviews and a detailed observation of the nursing students using an observation guide. The data collected from the interview was analysed using an inductive analysis approach while the observation was analysed using content analysis. The results revealed that student nursing mothers face numerous challenges in their pursuit of academic achievement but they adopt several ways to cope with them. Combining childcare, post-maternity complications and family demands makes it very difficult for student nursing mothers to focus on their academic work. To deal with these challenges, students nursing mothers relied on their husbands, hiring a babysitter, participation in group discussion, developing a good relationship with lecturers and using other psychological tactics to enhance learning. Also, most students, breastfeeding were interrupted by "lecture calls" and had to run back to lectures to avoid missing out. It is recommended that universities should consider instituting policies that can offer student nursing mothers' academic leverage and infrastructure support. Women must also be encouraged to have stable sources of income before pursuing further studies to help them financially. Husbands are encouraged to support their wives and partners to further their education and provide them with necessary support they need at early stages of childcare.*

KEYWORDS: Student nursing mothers, academic work, child care, family demands and support, coping strategies

INTRODUCTION

Two of the greatest gifts given by nature are procreation and progeny (Yang, Burns, Salamonson & Schmied, 2019). Traditionally, some people believe that procreation ensures creating a bloodline and allows parents to pass down their knowledge, beliefs, customs, and tradition to the future generation (Yang et al., 2019). Though fathers have a significant role to play, psychologists and medical experts (Langford, Gowan & Haj, 2021) alike argued that the woman's part is essential for the child's survival. Besides the numerous discrimination women face for being women, nursing a baby also takes a hefty toll on a woman's health and disrupts her career (Segovia-Pérez & Sánchez, 2020). Tomori, Gribble and Gross (2020) contend that nursing mothers who intend to pursue their education or blending it with their ongoing education are at a significant disadvantage. Performing the roles of a student and a mother is characterized by several academic, childcare, and economic or financial challenges. Similarly, Doherty, Horwood and Engebretsen (2020) noted that schooling and nursing a baby concurrently results to inadequate access to spouse, family, friends, lecturers, church members and leisure. For most women in developing countries, Bhattacharjee, Schaeffer, Albright and Hay (2019) found economic challenges such as inadequate funds for academic, accommodation fees, feeding, and other logistics drugs as some of the challenges nursing mothers faces while schooling.

The challenges as mentioned above are underpinned in role conflict, arguing that role conflict occurs when people experience incompatible work demands (Dukuzumuremyi, Acheampong, Abesig & Luo, 2020). According to the theory, each person has a unique work role with special rights and responsibilities. Therefore, when people simultaneously occupy multiple positions, both within and outside the organization, it results into conflicts. Ghana's tertiary education system's culture assumes that all students have time to attend classes without other responsibilities and treat their education as their primary responsibility (Abodey, Vanderpuye, Mensah & Badu, 2020). For these reasons, Anibijuwon and Esimai (2020) noted that taking on motherhood and childcare alongside educational pursuits is not considered normal in several universities across Ghana. However, no laws or policies are prohibiting it. This is akin to the SDG2 (2019) report that nursing mothers experience unpleasant emotional pressures across Africa and receive negative feedback from the academic environment, implying that education must be their priority.

Women's changing role in society and economic hardship have made it necessary for nursing mothers to combine childcare, homecare, career and studies (Atta-Asiedu, 2020). This means that even though a nursing mother may be in school, she still has specific responsibilities to fulfil at

home. In the studies of Dankyi, Dankyi, and Minadzi (2019) and Amos and Manieson (2015), it was concluded that the role conflict experienced by nursing mothers and married women affect their academic performance in school and appreciable performance at home. The struggles they go through include the inability to attend face-to-face lessons regularly, and inadequate preparation for examinations. All these challenges affect their learning and level of achievements at the pre-tertiary institutions.

The number of females enrolling in higher institutions is increasing, mostly of mothers resuming school or enrolling into university late (Ekeleme, Iwuoha & Ejikem, 2020; Shehu & Shehu, 2019). Available evidence (Ahinkorah, Hagan Jr & Budu, 2020; Abekah-Nkrumah, Antwi, Nkrumah & Gbagbo, 2020) indicate an increasing number of nursing mother among these female students who either gave birth before deciding to school or during their programme. At AAMUSTED, we observed increase in maternal-related illness, fatigue, lateness to lectures, inability to meet assignment deadlines, non-participation in examinations, uncompromising lecturers' attitudes and stigma that militate against nursing mothers coping with academic work.

On the state of student nursing mothers in Ghanaian universities and the little information available give conflicting information on how they can cope with academic work and strategies they adopt (Aryeetey et al., 2020). Duodu, Duah, Dzomeku and Agbadi (2020) observed that women are forced to pursue higher academic qualifications for better job opportunities concurrently with maternal duties

The purpose of the study was to explore how student nursing mothers cope with academic work at AAMUSTED. The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What are the challenges student nursing mothers face in pursuit of their academic work at AAMUSTED?
2. What strategies do student nursing mothers adopt to cope with their academic work at AAMUSTED?

The answers to the above research questions would be significant because this study's findings would serve as a source of information for gender advocates to better understand the situation of students nursing mothers. This would enable them to push for better conditions for nursing mothers and women in general. Further, the educational institution would also become aware of the challenges student nursing mothers are currently facing and make the necessary adjustment to ease their plight. This study's findings would help clarify conflicting information on the challenges students nursing mothers have to acquire in securing higher academic qualifications.

The term role conflict describes a contending situation where two or more of a person's roles require attending to at the same time or incompatible features within the same role (Zou, Guo & Li, 2019). Further, Cho, Kim, Chin and Ahmad (2020) noted that incompatibilities always consist of differing expectations, requirements, beliefs and attitudes. Concerning student nursing mothers, the conflicts of their roles is because they are nursing a baby who is fragile and absolutely dependent on a mother who happens to be a student and must fulfil specific academic requirements. Liao, Lau and Kong (2019) have the opinion that the educational environment expects her to dedicate her full time to the teaching and learning process while the babe or nursing motherhood also demands undivided attention from the mother. Similarly, Maloni, Gligor and Boyd (2019) argued that another side to this situation is that the student nursing mother faces two dilemmas; the first is the intra-role conflict in which she struggles with the conflict of taking care of the baby and the rest of the family (the home). Proponents of the theory refer to this situation as an incompatible requirement within the same role (Hirschi, Shockley & Zacher, 2019; O'Lynn, O'Connor & Kellett, 2020). On the other hand, the second dilemma is the inter-role conflict which has to do with nursing demands and academic demands. In this instance, she has to fulfil the requests of nursing the baby and the intellectual needs of learning and writing examinations. Proponents of the theory refer to this situation as clashing expectations from separate roles within the same person (Aboobaker & Edward, 2020; Taylor, Huml & Dixon, 2019).

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a personality theory that includes behavioural factors. It focuses on the motivation behind the choices that individuals make. The theory was inspired by research into intrinsic motivation, which is the idea of engaging in an activity because it is exciting and satisfying rather than being motivated to achieve a goal or receive an external reward such as money (Ryan & Deci, 2019). With intrinsic motivation, Gilal, Zhang and Gilal (2019) noted that a nursing mother seeks out challenges such as acquiring higher education qualifications that allow for growth. With intrinsic motivation, a nursing mother flourishes if her efforts are linked with a sense of security and understanding (Ryan & Deci, 2019).

Bull, Al-Ansari and Willumsen, (2020) observed that nursing mothers face challenges such as maternal-related illness, fatigue, lateness to lectures, inability to meet assignment deadlines, nonparticipation in examinations, uncompromising attitudes of lecturers and fellow students, stigma (or unfavourable comments). Similarly, Maloni et al. (2019) also argued that student nursing mothers face the intra-role conflict. She struggles with taking care of the baby and taking care of the rest of the family at home. Albright and Hay, (2019) found that economic challenges such as inadequate funds for academics, accommodation fees, feeding, and other logistics and

drugs are some of the challenges nursing mothers faces while schooling. These challenges are underpinned in role conflict, arguing that role conflict occurs when people experience incompatible work demands (Dukuzumuremyi, Acheampong, Abesig, & Luo, 2020).

According to Adofo (2013) to appropriately perform multiple roles, student mothers in Ghana applied simultaneous management strategies and organization approaches to adapt to contradictions resulting from concurrent tasks (Adofo, 2013). Similarly, Forster and Offei Ansah (2012) conducted a study entitled Domestic affairs and coping strategies of female students in Ghana. In their study, students used a variety of strategies, such as delegating domestic roles, prioritizing, planning, and organizing activities to ensure that their family life did not suffer while they were at university (Forster & Offei-Ansah, 2012). Moghadam, Khiaban, Esmaeili and Salsali (2017) indicate that simultaneously being a student and a mother was challenging, yet manageable, requiring planning in various fields. Moreau and Kerner (2013) stated that the nature of parenting and academic tasks required careful planning to combine these activities (Moreau & Kerner, 2013).

Dankyi, Dankyi and Minadzi (2019) looked into student mothers' struggles and coping strategies at the University of Cape Coast Distance Education. The study found that most respondents go through academic struggles such as the inability to attend face-to-face lectures regularly because of tiredness, sickness of a child, taking the baby to a child welfare clinic and lack of lactating rooms for breastfeeding babies. Respondents relied on paid house help to cope with the struggles, keeping children at day-care centres, raising loans and relying on husbands and friends for support. Therefore, the study recommended providing lactating rooms, day-care centres and counselling services for student-mothers in all College of Distance Education centres. Kisanga and Matiba (2021) investigated student mothers' coping strategies in pursuing higher education studies in Tanzania. They advocated for hiring part-time babysitters and using friends/relatives to take care of the child while in class, engaging in private studies during the daytime and interacting with hardworking students severing links with lazy friends.

METHODOLOGY

The study was grounded in an interpretive position concerned with how the phenomena of interest are interpreted, understood, experienced, produced, or constituted (FitzPatrick, 2019). This study fits into the interpretivist paradigm because we interacted with the student nursing mothers chosen for the study through interview. We gathered all the information that we needed from the student nursing mothers and later transcribed them by interpreting what those respondents told us during the interview and observation we made. The study adopted a qualitative research approach. We

used a systematic scientific inquiry to seek and build a holistic narrative description to gain an in-depth understanding of a social or cultural phenomenon (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019). As qualitative approach, we used the thematic approach to organize data into categories and identify relationships between academic work requirements and the strategies they adopt to cope with academic work. An exploratory case study is a qualitative research design that involves in-depth investigation of a specific case or phenomenon to gain insights and generate hypothesis (Meriam & Tsidel, 2016). It typically involves collecting and analysing various types of data, such as interviews, observations, documents and artefacts to develop a comprehensive understanding of the case in its real-life context.

The study was conducted at the Akenten Appiah-Minkah University of Skills Training and Entrepreneurial Development (AAMUSTED) that is situated in Kumasi. AAMUSTED was formally called University of Education, Kumasi Campus but it gained autonomy in AAMUSTED Act 2020, (Act 1026) to operate on its own or an independent institution. Unofficial investigation indicates that AAMUSTED has many student nursing mothers and pregnant women compared to the other campuses and similar institutions. Although no verifiable reasons have been given, evidence of these observations can be found in the works of (Amoabea, Abigail, Adei & Yaa, 2020; Amos et al., 2019).

The total population of the study was all student nursing mothers enrolled in post graduate studies for 2021/22 academic at AAMUSTED. This was made up of 22 student nursing mothers at the University. The population covered below Departments at AAMUSTED. Research population refers to the entire group of individuals or objects that the researcher wants to study (Babbie, 2016). It represents the larger target group from which the sample was drawn (Creswell, 2013). The total population of the student nursing mothers is shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Population of Student Nursing Mothers

Name of Dept.	No of Students (F)
Accounting Education	4
Catering and Hospitality	3
Business Education	5
Fashion Design and Textiles Education	4
Early Grade Education	6
Total	22

The sample size involved in the study was 15 student nursing mothers. This was because of the difficulty of identifying student nursing mothers at AAMUSTED. At the time of data collection, only 15 student nursing mothers were readily available. The sample size of the student nursing mothers is shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Sample of Student Nursing Mothers

Name of Dept.	No of Students (F)
Accounting Education	3
Catering and Hospitality	2
Business Education	4
Fashion Design and Textiles Education	2
Early Grade Education	4
Total	15

Due to the difficulty in identifying student nursing mothers, a combination of sample techniques such as purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to locate and collect the necessary data from student nursing mothers. Since it is a systematic data collection approach, the researchers

examined female students in natural settings or naturally occurring situations on campus. It involved prolonged engagement in a location or social interaction to identify students nursing mothers, which spanned a number of days until the first student nursing mother was determined. The researchers purposively selected them for the study. An interview guide was designed to enable the researchers to collect in-depth information on student nursing mothers coping with their academic work. To ensure that each data gathered from the nursing mothers can be referred to in case of uncertainty, the entire interview was recorded, and critical issues were written down. The researchers adopted the naturalistic observation to observe student nursing mothers in their natural environment. Naturalistic observation is a research method where subjects are observed in their natural environment without any interferences or manipulation by the researcher (Smith & Jones, 2018). The goal of this type of observation was to understand and describe the behaviour of participants naturally as it occurs. Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the degree to which the findings, interpretations and conclusions of a study are reliable, credible and valid (Morse, 2014). The data were subject to credibility, confirmability, dependability, transferability, and authenticity. The data gathered from the interviews and observations was analysed using thematic analysis and content observation analysis respectively. The researchers sought the consent of management of the school and gave a full detail of what the study was about. Upon identifying a student nursing mother, all COVID 19 protocols were strictly observed to ensure the safety of the mothers, the babies and the researchers. Issues regarding pregnancy, nursing babies, family issues, academic issues and personal financial capacity can be seen as very intruding if not asked or handled with professionalism (Arifin, 2018; Suri, 2020). Evidence in literature suggest that most respondents may withhold some information from the researchers if they deem it too sensitive and exposing. Others may withhold information if the researcher fail to present the study in a relevant context or assure the respondents of absolute confidentiality (Connelly, 2014; Broesch, Crittenden & Mulder, 2020).

Demographic Information of Respondents (Students)

The results are presented in Table 3

Table 3: Demographic Information of Student Nursing Mothers (Respondents)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age group		
30-35	8	53.5%
36-40	4	26.5%
40 and above	3	20%

Marital Status		
Married	10	67%
Single	2	13.5%
Widowed	1	6.5%
Divorced	1	6.5%
Separated	1	6.5%
Religious status		
Christianity	10	67%
Islamic	3	20%
Traditional	1	6.5%
Others	1	6.5%
Employment Status		
Employed	9	60%
Unemployed	3	20%
Self-employed	3	20%
Programme of Study		
Accounting Education	3	20%
Catering and Hospitality	2	13.5%
Business Management	4	26.5%
Fashion Design and Textiles	2	13.5%
Early Grade Education	4	26.5%
Mode of Sponsorship		
My self	3	20%
My Husband	2	13.5%
My Self and My Husband	5	33%
Scholarship	2	13.5%
Support from Family	2	13.5%
Support From friends	1	6.5%
Total	15	100%

Source: Field Data (2021)

The table above describes the demographic results of participants for the study. From the table, 8 representing 53% of student nursing mothers were aged between 30-35 years, then 4 representing 26.5% were aged between 36-40 years and 3 representing 20% were 40 years and above. This implies that all student nursing mothers had experiences on child birth were old enough to provide credible information for the study.

On the table again, the marital status of student nursing mothers was analysed. Out of the 15 student nursing mothers selected for the study, ten (10) representing 67% were successfully married, two (2) representing 13.5% were single, one (1) representing 6.5% had been divorced and only one (1) student nursing mother had been separated. This shows that majority of the student nursing mothers had their husbands available to render assistance physically and emotionally since they lived or stayed with their husbands.

Religious status of student nursing mothers was also assessed. From the table, majority of the student nursing mothers were Christians with a total number of ten (10) and 67%, then three (3) which was 20% were Muslims and then one (1) was a traditionalist and one (1) fall as others.

The employment status of student nursing mothers was also analysed. From the table, nine (9) representing 60% were employed, three (3) representing 20% were also self-employed and three (3) representing 20% were unemployed. This implies that majority of the student nursing mothers aside their pursuit for education, were employed in their own businesses or rendering services to the government or private institutions.

From the table again, it was observed that the programme of study was also analysed. Three student nursing mothers from the Accounting Education with a total of 20%. Then two (2) students from Catering and Hospitality with a percentage of 13.5% and four (4) students from Business Education representing 26.5%, then two (2) students from Fashion Design and Textiles Education and finally, four (4) students were selected from Early Grade Education representing 26.5%.

Finally, from the table, the mode of sponsorship for student nursing mothers were analysed. It was revealed that, three (3) students sponsored their education themselves, two (2) students revealed they were sponsored by their husband, five (5) students revealed the combination of themselves and the husband as both pulled resources together to sponsor the education. Then two students had scholarship benefit while two other students had support from the family as their mode of sponsorship and finally a student had support from friends to embark on her education process.

Research Question One: What are the challenges facing student nursing mothers in pursuing their academic work at AAMUSTED?

The above research question examines the difficulties student nursing mothers face in pursuit of their academic work at AAMUSTED. After interview and observation with post graduate student nursing mothers, the following themes emerged as; health complications during and after pregnancy, difficulty in time management, conflicting demands of family duties, difficulty meeting academic requirements (missing lectures, backlog of assignments) and financial challenges. These difficulties militated against student nursing mothers in the quest of their academic work on campus.

Health Complications during and after Pregnancy

Health issues in relation to pregnancy has a lot of implications for pregnant women. During this stages, pregnant women are at risk of facing a lot of disease such as German measles, postpartum depression and endometriosis disorders that might affect fertility and increase the risk of complications during pregnancy. Such complications put student nursing mothers in difficult task ahead of their academic work. Below were some the comments of student nursing mothers after interview session.

A Student Nursing Mother revealed:

Nursing mothers face many challenges when they decide to pursue higher education; these challenges are usually related to post-pregnancy issues, breastfeeding and family. I have not developed any complications during pregnancy and as I am breastfeeding. However, I can tell you that some of my close friends are going through many health challenges after giving birth. These challenges were developed during or after birth and in most cases, the babies also developed complications. The difficulty I face is that combining childcare and other family duties results in frequent disruptions to my studies. This has affected my academic performance, and I believed I could have done much better if these challenges were not there. (An expression from a student mother).

Another student mother commented:

I have experienced a lot of health complications after giving birth to my third child when I enrolled in this programme. As I speak to you now am battling gestational diabetes. I visit the hospital twice every month because of this disease. I am unable

to concentrate on my academic work very well because of this condition and even depression, anxiety and others. (An expression from a student mother).

The study found out that student nursing mothers experience a lot of challenges in pursuit of their education at AAMUSTED. Some of the challenges student nursing mothers' faces were health complications during and after pregnancy. Generally, it can be observed that most of the student nursing mothers face many challenges that adversely affect their ability to learn and perform well in their academic requirements. Most of these challenges are due to the undivided attention requirement of babies. In addition, the interviews also noted that most of the nursing mothers face health-related challenges, usually from the babies and the post-natal illness the mothers go through. Similarly, Bull, Al-Ansari and Willumsen, (2020) observed that nursing mothers face challenges such as maternal-related illness, fatigue, lateness to lectures, inability to meet assignment deadlines, nonparticipation in examinations, uncompromising attitudes of lecturers and fellow students, stigma (or unfavourable comments).

Difficulty in Time Management

Difficulty in time management was identified as one of the themes that emerged. Balancing demands of being a student and a nursing mother is challenging especially when it comes to managing time effectively. Juggling coursework, attending clinics and childcare responsibilities places difficulty in time management. Below are comments from student nursing mothers;

A Student Nursing Mother noted:

I mostly go for lectures late not because I like doing that but I have to breast feed my child before going for lectures to prevent him from crying (An expression from a student).

Another student mother reacted:

My childcare responsibilities make it difficult to manage time very well. I am unable to meet a lot of deadlines because of the responsibilities ahead of me and other family issues (An expression from a student mother)

Student nursing mothers revealed difficulty in time management as one of the challenges they face in pursuit of their academic work. It was identified that students fail to meet a lot of deadlines and other academic task because of the childcare responsibilities. Not only deadlines, they also attend

lectures late and sometimes not at all. This means that student nursing mothers go through a herculean task in terms of time management in their education.

The analysis of the observation checklist revealed a similar challenge. It was observed that about 70% of student nursing mothers attend lectures late because they have to breastfeed their babies well before getting into the classroom. In some cases, student nursing mothers are forced to send their children on the entrance of lecture halls in order to listen to what is being taught in lectures.

Conflicting Demands of Family Duties

Student nursing mothers face challenges of balancing family duties and their education. The demands of childcare and breastfeeding usually clash with study schedules, making it challenging to manage both effectively. This can lead to stress and affect academic performances. Student nursing mothers revealed the following comments;

A student mother said:

Taking care of this baby and handling family issues disrupts my ability to concentrate; there are many disruptions. I am unable to learn at places like the library and reading room. Whenever the baby starts crying it causes disruptions to the other students studying there. Also, there are no convenient places for me to lay the baby down when she sleeps. Further, due to the library rules, I cannot bring in a third person to take care of the baby while I study. Generally, the university does not have specialised places for nursing mothers as they do for other people with disabilities.” (An expression from a student nursing mother)

A student nursing mother further revealed:

My family gives me a lot of pressure. Sometimes when am at lectures, I receive calls from the home on issues which create double attention while at lectures. How do I concentrate on what is been taught? It is really sad because I go through a lot of stress and I am highly depressed with the current situation at hand (An expression from a student mother).

Again, the conflicting roles like being mothers and students exist because students are nursing a baby who is fragile and absolutely dependant on a mother who happens to be a student and must fulfil specific academic requirements. In the same vein, Liao et al. (2019) argued that the educational environment expects her to dedicate her full time to the teaching and learning process

whilst the baby also demands undivided attention from the mother. Similarly, Maloni et al. (2019) also argued that student nursing mothers face the intra-role conflict. She struggles with taking care of the baby and taking care of the rest of the family at home. Proponents of role-conflict theory refer to this situation as an incompatible requirement within the same role (Hirschi, Shockley & Zacher 2019; O'Lynn, O'Connor & Kellet 2020).

Difficulty Meeting Academic Requirements

Student nursing mothers walk through challenging task in order to meet all academic requirements. Such challenges affect the academic performances of students because they are unable to meet deadlines, submit assignments and other important documents on time.

A student mother reacted as:

Meeting deadlines has been my problem always, sometimes I have to hire people and pay them to complete my assignments for me. I know this is actually not helping me in my academic but because of my childcare responsibilities, I have to do that to complete my education process successfully (An expression from a student nursing mother).

Another expression from a student mother:

Sometimes because of my child I have to miss lectures and take him to hospital for treatment. One of the semesters, I missed three weeks lectures because my child was admitted at the hospital (An expression from a student mother).

Every institution has its own rules, regulations and requirements. Meeting all academic requirements requires self-discipline and dedication. Student nursing mothers mostly lack these characters because of their childcare responsibilities.

Financial Challenges

Financial constrains remained one of the difficult tasks that student nursing mothers face in their academic work. The following comments were revealed by students after data collection.

A student nursing mother noted:

Due to financial challenges, I cannot hire experienced babysitters, and my husband is a very busy person. So, I have to spend more time with the three children and

take care of other home duties. Because of this, I regularly miss lectures and when I attend lectures, I am always late and require extra time to catch up with what was taught. I also fall asleep often during lectures and also leave class during lectures to attend to the baby. All these make it very difficult for me to study. (An expression from a student nursing mother)

Financial constrains has made a lot of student nursing mothers education process a challenging one. With the cost of education and child care responsibilities requires a lot of finance. One must be financially sound to hire nannies to care for their babies while at lectures. This implies that, students' needs sponsors from family, friends and other institutions responsible for maternal welfare. Albright and Hay, (2019) found that economic challenges such as inadequate funds for academics, accommodation fees, feeding, and other logistics drugs are some of the challenges nursing mothers faces while schooling. These challenges are underpinned in role conflict, arguing that role conflict occurs when people experience incompatible work demands (Dukuzumuremyi, Acheampong, Abesig, & Luo, 2020).

Research Question Two: What strategies do student nursing mothers adopt to cope with their academic work at AAMUSTED?

The student nursing mothers were questioned on their strategies to study and enhance their academic performance amidst the many challenges they go through combining home responsibilities with educational requirements. In order to cope with the academic work, student nursing mothers developed key strategies that helped them to cope with academic work at the University. The following themes were identified as reliance on husbands and external family and friends to assist students take care of their babies and time management.

Below were some of the responses of student nursing mothers.

A student mother revealed:

Though I have some financial challenges, nonetheless, with my husband support, I have hired a babysitter to help take care of the baby at the scheduled period to relieve me of home duties and form of childcare. This has proven very useful as it gives me ample time to study and participate in group discussions as wells give me full concentration during lectures. (An expression from a student mother)

Another student mother commented as:

My kid sister used to accompany me for lectures every day. We settle at the corridor of the University library since there are convenient spaces to put our items at for safe keeping. Again, most of my lecture rooms are closer to the University library so immediately I receive a phone call from her, I have to leave the lecture hall and attend to my baby. This strategy helped me so much to cope with my academic work (An expression from a student nursing mother).

On the reliance of husbands, family members and friends, Dankyi et al. (2019) looked into student mothers' struggles and coping strategies at the University of Cape Coast Distance Education. The study found that most respondents go through academic struggles such as the inability to attend face-to-face lectures regularly because of tiredness, sickness of a child, taking the baby to a child welfare clinic and lack of lactating rooms for breastfeeding babies. Respondents relied on paid house help to cope with the struggles, keeping children at day-care centres, raising loans and relying on husbands and friends for support

Time Management

Time management was another strategy that was used as a strategy to cope with the academic work of student nursing mothers. The ability to manage time was one of the important ingredients in education especially for student nursing mothers because of their dual responsibilities. The following were some of the comments that was revealed by student nursing mothers after interview.

A student mother noted:

“I have learned to switch between ideas on concepts of a subject while studying. In addition, I have learnt to use specific examples to understand abstract ideas relating to the course. I combine words and visuals during lectures and learning for better understanding.”

A student said:

For me time management has really benefited me in my education because, I have been able to meet all deadlines that was assigned to us since the start of this programme. Again, I have benefited from time management because I used to breastfeed my child on time to fell asleep before I go for lectures (An expression from a student).

Students' ability to manage time and work within a specified time frame brings a lot of comfort among student nursing mothers. Time management is highly needed in education to avoid unnecessary fall outs in assignments and other academic requirements. Student nursing mother tried in diverse ways to manage their little time available to support and cope with their academic work in the University.

Again, observations made also reported that, students\ nursing mothers tried as much as possible to manage their time but this process was sometimes fraught with duties of the child. For instance, it was observed from a student nursing mother that, any time she planned her schedules for her academic work, it was always troubled with activities and duties of the child.

CONCLUSION

Student nursing mothers face numerous challenges in their pursuit of academic achievement. Combining childcare, post-maternity complications and family demands makes it very difficult for student nursing mothers to focus on their academic work. These challenges result in divided attention, conflicting responsibility, and stress. This implies that student nursing mothers face myriad of challenges in their pursuit of academic work. Such challenges affect the academic performances of students and the University and stakeholders should support battle such challenges.

To offset these challenges, the student nursing mothers have adopted various strategies to mitigate its impact on their academic performance. These strategies include reliance on their husbands, hiring a babysitter, participation in group discussion, developing a good relationship with lecturers and using other psychological tactics to enhance learning. It was essential to reduce the challenges that student nursing mothers face to improve their academic performances.

Recommendations

1. The University authorities should provide adequate time and different schedules for the education of student nursing mothers and provide them with the necessary support during their education process to reduce the challenges student nursing mothers face.
2. Husbands should be encouraged to support their wives or partners to further their education and provide them with the necessary support they need during the early stages of childcare

to reduce stress, conflicting responsibilities and divided attention on student nursing mothers.

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